Tells the Facts and Names the Names

CounterPunch

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The Great Nike Rally

Nike held its annual shareholders' meeting in Portland, Oregon, on September 22. Since the company represents many of the nastiest aspects of late twentieth century capitalism (which bears a close resemblance to late nineteenth century capitalism) **CounterPunch** went along into the cavernous Oregon Convention Center to observe the proceedings.

There were some 2,000 shareholders present, each armed with a Nike tote bag, stuffed with T-shirts made in China and of course adorned with the omnipresent Nike "Swoosh" logo. A gentle tide of Nike investors washed its way through the convention center's corridors, affording the opportunity to pose beside cardboard cut-outs of Nike icons, such as Michael Jordan, Ken Griffey, Jr. and the Brazilian soccer star Romario.

Dusty Kidd, Nike's director of labor practices, ambled about, hawking Andrew Young's whitewash of the company's activities in Indonesia and Vietnam. "On any given day," Kidd confided to **CounterPunch**, "Nike has upwards of 500,000 people making our products in south-east Asia. Sure there's going to be one or two problems. But our workers are happy people, happy to have as much work as they can get, happy to have a clean place to sleep and food to eat. Good food. Nike workers are happy workers. All this uproar isn't really about working conditions, but how we've responded to them, which hasn't always been the best way in the past."

Representative of the winds of change is Veda Manager, formerly an aide to the late Ron Brown and now top Nike flack. Matching his late boss in bare-faced effrontery, Manager eschewed sophisticated apologias in favor of flat assertions that all charges against Nike in the area of labor relations are quite simply "lies".

Inside the main hall the first serious order of business was a religious ceremony, the Celebration of Profit. Nike's president, Tom Clarke, read out the holy numbers, which produced a high ecstatic response among Nike adepts. Clarke reported that 1996 saw a 42 per cent increase in revenues and a 44 per cent increase in net profits. The share price of Nike stock, Clarke confided, has increased thirty-fold since 1987. All eyes duly swiveled to the unlovely figure of Nike founder and CEO, Phil Knight, now the fifth richest man in the world. Knight, with his beard, carrotty hair and white Nehru shirt and black tuxedo looked like a cut-price Mephistopheles on lease from Madame Tussaud's.

True to any religious ceremony, Clarke did inject a note of warning. Nike's US footwear market is beginning to "flatten out", and in consequence the company has decided to focus on two markets, women (an unexploited target, at least in their role as consumers), and "the emerging markets of Asia". From Tom Clarke and Dusty Kidd at a press conference came the faltering admission that the campaign (aka "lies) against Nike had made a dent in domestic sales.

The shareholders were treated to Nike commercials aimed at the Far East market, made for the company by Spike Lee. The first showed some Asian women jogging along and sweating profusely, all in full Nike running gear. Across the screen scrolled the words, "I dream of freedom", with the soundtrack playing Aerosmith's rock anthem, "Dream On". The other was even more degraded: images of Asians grunting, injured on soccer fields and basketball courts, accompanied by the slogan

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Our Little Secret

Al's Sheep-like Counsel

If Al Gore's choice of personal attorney in his fund-raising troubles is any guide, don't look to Ozone Man to put together an aggressive team to run the country if somehow, against increasing odds, he makes it to the White House in 2000. In September, facing the likelihood of a special prosecutor, Gore picked George Frampton as one of his lawyers. (The other lawyer is the indubitably competent James Neal.) Frampton's recent c.v. scarcely advertises tigerish instincts for the jugular. He was a notably lackadaisical assistant secretary of Interior, supervising the administrative dismantling of the Endangered Species Act.

Before that he ran the Wilderness Society, where his stewardship was summed up in his despondent claim that there really wasn't much wilderness left to save any more.

Meanwhile, Gore is displaying that very special mix of opportunism he has made his own over the years. If ever there was a crunch enviro vote in recent months it was surely the September face-off in the US senate, over a vote to slash the $40 million annual subsidy by the US Forest Service to build logging roads for the timber companies in publicly owned forests. Amazingly, a bill pushed by green grassrooters and supported by many eastern senators had a good chance of winning last month. As the votes were tallied, excitement grew. It looked like a 50-50 ballot and of course Ozone Man would be there flashing his green credentials to push it over the top. But the bill went down. No Al.

He was availing himself of a photo op, standing behind Clinton on a dais as President McMuffin issued a tortured justification for not signing the landmine treaty. Even then Al could have rushed to the senate for a last minute rescue, but other duties called. He headed for New York, for a DNC fund-raiser.

Editors
Ken Silverstein
Alexander Cockburn

Co-writers
Jeffrey St.Clair
JoAnn Wypijewski

Production
Terry Allen

Counselor
Ben Sonnenberg

Design
Deborah Thomas

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CounterPunch
P.O. Box 18675
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-986-3665 (phone)
202-986-0974 (fax)

Fly-In-Soup Frenzy

Now for an update on Laura Ingraham. As we reported a while back in **CounterPunch**, while editor of the Dartmouth Review, Ingraham sent infiltrators into a meeting of a campus gay group, then notified members' parents of their children's "sodomite" tendencies. Thus carving out for herself a niche as the media's official anti-feminist analyst, Ingraham has become even more insufferable.

A friend of **CounterPunch** recently spotted Ingraham throwing a violent temper tantrum at Coppi's Vigorelli, a restaurant in northwest Washington. Ingraham, who was accompanied by three other bratty young conservatives, went ballistic over a risotto that she deemed inelegantly prepared. "It looks like it came from Chef-Boy-ar-Dee," she screamed at the waiter.

When the chef came out to see what the fuss was all about, Ingraham attacked her, too. "She gave me a look like I had served her dog food," the chef, who received no other complaints about the risotto, tells us. "She was rude to the waiter, rude to the host and rude to me."

Oh God! H-e-e-r-e's Bob

For those who have high hopes for elections unsullied by corporate dollars and the disbursements of the rich, comes dismaying news in the forms of seven letters, C-H-L-O-P-A-K, aka Bob Chlopak, the slimy Democratic Party fixer. In the forefront of campaign finance reform is Public Campaign, run by Ellen Miller, formerly of the Center for Responsive Politics. Public Campaign is lavishly endowed by George Soros and others. Among the foundations, campaign finance is as hot this year as were the rainforests in the late 1980s.

Into the hands of **Our Little Secret** has dropped a memo from Miller to her board of directors. In this revealing document Miller recounts the successes of the summer, including a recent conference in which Senator Paul Wellstone made what she describes as "an inspirational keynote address" and a session on "message discipline" led by their strategic consultant, Bob Chlopak.

Chlopak is no stranger to **CounterPunch**, and indeed readers may remember our unflattering accounts of the way he worked with James Carville on the Brazilian elections and before that his less than edifying role in the health care fight and before that his sabotage of efforts to save the ancient forests of the northwest. Chlopak is the quintessential Democratic Party hack and a Beltway player. The idea that he might play a positive role in campaign finance reform is like expecting Iago to become a bona fide marriage counsellor.

This summer, Miller reports in her memo, Public Campaign has been pursuing a typically Chlopakian strategy. Instead of trying to build up outrage across the country against the corruption of Beltway politics (and polls show the public is cynical on the issue) Public

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Campaign is pursuing a classic inside-the-beltway game. Miller boasts of a "wave of Public Campaign ads"—running entirely in the Washington market, the idea being that this $300,000 plus effort will arouse the interest of the usual suspects, "opinion leaders—the reporters, commentators, lobbyists and legislators whose views get regular exposure nationwide and help frame the national debate on campaign finance reform".

The idea is that *Newsweek's* Jonathan Alter, Rick Hertzberg (recently downgraded at the *New Yorker*), Elizabeth Drew (in semi-retirement) and others will be provoked by the ads to whip up a national appetite for reform. Thoroughly marinated in the argot of the Beltway, Miller tells her board that running the advertisements in DC makes Public Campaign "*real* among political reporters and opinion leaders whose words and ideas circulate far beyond the Beltway....which in turn builds pressure for real reform in Washington". As earnest of how this approach is already yielding rich rewards, Miller excitedly invokes the name of Brooks Jackson, who "personally told Ellen the ads were 'fabulous'". Jackson is the truly awful political correspondent of CNN whose narcotic homilies would cause even the most zealous public citizens to pull the covers over their heads.

Come on Ellen, dump Chlopak and get on the road. All he'll do is take your money and kill your campaign.

Peretz Man's Red Past

Having fired his editor, Michael Kelly, for attacking his pal Al Gore, Martin Peretz, owner of the New Republic, turned to Charles Lane, a man who for nearly two decades has dutifully proven himself willing to do what Marty tells him. He's now an assiduous left-basher, but Lane is a man with a past. He attended the elite Bethesda-Chevy Chase high school where he fell under the influence of a radical leftist teacher and was soon calling for a worldwide uprising of the oppressed. Next stop was Harvard, where he entered as a freshman in 1979. A colleague from that period remembers Lane as a firebrand Marxist who opposed all political and social reforms on the grounds that such measures would lessen the internal contradictions of capitalism and sedate the masses. The end result would be to prolong the lifespan of the capitalist system that Lane burned to overthrow.

The end of Lane's brief career as the Lenin of Chevy Chase came after he took an internship at the New Republic in the early 1980s. Before long he was loyally parrotting the Peretz neoconservative line. Even Charles Krauthammer, one of Peretz's most reliable henchfolk was said to be disgusted by Lane's shameless attempts to curry favor with Peretz.

"Pronounced through an Ascending sob": Clive James pens the silliest sentences ever written in Tina Brown's *New Yorker*.

Lane, moving right, landed a job at Newsweek, where he echoed President Reagan's warnings of an imminent Communist takeover of Latin America. The man who once championed the downtrodden now boasted to friends and colleagues about the large number of house boys he employed to maintain his residence in San Salvador.

Parry's Late Thrust

You may be getting a mailer from Bob Parry, who puts out *The Consortium* newsletter. In a plea for money for his investigative fund, Parry announces "upcoming stories that the fund will support". Among them, "how the CIA bungled recent intelligence operations, including a disastrous covert operation to oust Iraq's Saddam Hussein." **CounterPunch** readers can smile the smug smile of those already on the inside track. Months ago we described present CIA director George Tenet's efforts to have Saddam killed, and the bungles of the CIA-backed Iraqi National Accord, whose most conspicuous operation was the detonation of bombs in Baghdad cinemas.

Di: Lest We Forget

"No. It was the first word of that cataclysmic Sunday morning: 'no' pronounced through an ascending sob, the consonant left behind in the chest voice as the vowel climbed into the head voice, the pure wail of lament whereby anyone, no matter how tone deaf, for one terrible moment becomes a singer. " Clive James, *The New Yorker*.

You think that was silly? Try this, from Michael Ignatieff, an English pundit known locally as the thinking woman's crumpet: "Our sorrow began with her and then eddied back upon ourselves. When we mourned her death, we mourned our own...We all had a hand in making the myths which killed her. It was impossible to stand outside her death. Irony suddenly became impossible."

The Ever-changing Record

In our last issue we discussed Daryl Jones, nominated as secretary of the Air Force. We noted his lobbying for the sleazy Homestead airport project. Now comes word that Jones, who's frequently boasted of his flying prowess, has in fact been grounded since 1991 as a menace to himself, his colleagues and his F-16. Jones has lied about his earthbound status on his resume. The "Jones grounded" leaks to the *Washington Post* come from high Air Force brass fretful because Jones is black. The Secretary of the Army, also black, and overseeing the sexual harassment cases, is known by his rivals as Wet Dick West.

In our July 16-31 story on John Sweeney, we said that the AFL-CIO takes in about $6 to $8 billion annually from its union affiliates. Actually, that figure is a rough estimate of total union dues paid by all AFL-CIO members. The AFL-CIO's own budget is a fraction of that amount.

In our September 1-15 report on drug industry guinea pigs, we reported the "Princeton University Medical Center" as the locale where Bristol-Myers Squibb conducts clinical tests. The actual name of the facility is the Medical Center at Princeton, which serves as the local hospital for Princeton Boro and Township. It has no connection to the university. ■

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Pittsburgh Diary:

Labor: The Quick & The Dead

"Class struggle scenario renewed as main topic at convention." This was the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review*, the city's anti-union paper, flagging its coverage of the final day of the A.F.L.-C.I.O.'s convention. The liberal *Post-Gazette* spoke more carefully of the "class divide", and inside the David L. Lawrence Convention Center the labor folk shunned the c-word altogether, preferring "America's working families" and even involving the notion of labor-management "partnership".

Fast track, much on the minds of the delegates, also preoccupied the procession of politicians who came to court them: Al Gore (whose caution in advance of 2000 kept him from saying anything at all on the subject), Tom Daschle, Ted Kennedy, Dick Gephardt, Bill Clinton, Bob Torricelli (an uninvited guest who, allowed a few words by Sweeney, unleashed a fifteen-minute prepared speech), even Arlen Specter.

The Republican Specter gave one of the more interesting talks, a nuts-and-bolts handicapper's analysis to this effect: Be realistic—the G.O.P. will control Congress for the foreseeable future; I'm relatively young and could be on the Senate labor committee for a long, long time. And you and I know there are worse Republicans, even worse Democrats. For instance, I don't agree with the President on everything; I'm against fast track. So let's make a deal.

The delegates roared for Gephardt, who regrets having voted for fast track on NAFTA now that he's made a tour of the maquiladora region and seen the effects of "cut-throat, runaway capitalism". He gave a little slide show—"Here's me walking across a drainage ditch"—which ended with him holding up the picture of a 2-year-old Mexican girl who lives in an unused concrete pipe and barely eats enough to survive. "This little girl is our little girl. She's us...This is a scandal!" He clarified his views later: "I don't want to *raise* standards", he told the press, "I just want countries to abide by the laws and standards they already have." Really? So let Chile be

"How long will we compete with China, which uses prison labor and where 10,000 miners are killed every year? How long?"

Chile, where labor law was written by Pinochet and environmental laws scarcely exist.

Gephardt's portrayal of Mexico as one great sewer didn't go down so well with the Mexican guests at the convention. No one likes being made to wear the hairshirt of misery for the sake of someone else scoring points. It's the same reason strawberry workers in Watsonville, who tend beautiful gardens at home, dress up on Sundays and take pride in their college-bound children, resent the United Farm Workers' portrayal of *all* of them as beaten into drudges, oozing with chemical sores and raped in the fields.

President Bill came to tell the delegates why he is right and they are wrong on fast track. "He Sister Souljah'd us", one delegate said afterward, and it was a useful reminder of just how wrong all those journalists down the years have been who've written that Clinton really believes in nothing, stands for nothing. He's always been a Fortune 500 man. In Pittsburgh he was all frankness, saying of trade agreements, "What this is about is how 4 percent of the world's people can continue to hold 22 percent of the world's wealth."

Guests from England were much impressed with the President's speech. "I thought it was wonderful to see a head of state so respectful of labor", one of them said. Respectful? But he spent fifteen minutes lecturing the delegates as if they were naughty sixth-graders on NAFTA? "Well, yes, but the other day at the TUC conference Tony Blair spent his *entire* speech lecturing us on how we are behind the times, need to get in step with neoliberal realities."

In 1877, Pittsburgh was the site of one of the bloodiest battles in labor history, a clash between railroad workers and their families and the national guard during the national rail strike. The workers struck after being refused an increase on their $1.65 a day wages and then being forced to do double the work. When members of the local militia refused to shoot their neighbors, the army was called in to do the job and the result was a massacre.

Delegates remembered this in the convention discussion over fast track, where it was recalled that these workers made 16 1/2 cents an hour, a wage rate now mirrored in countries like Indonesia, Vietnam, Haiti and China.

"How long will we compete with countries that use slave and slave-wage labor, my friends? How long? Not long.

"How long will we compete with child labor? How long? Not long.

"How long will we compete with China, which uses prison labor and where 10,000 miners are killed every year? How long? Not long. United we stand, divided we fall. An injury to one is an injury to all. Down with fast track!"

That was Cecil Roberts, president of the United Mine Workers, who also reminded the convention that Congressional rape-and-pillagers led by Cass Ballinger of North Carolina are plumping to do away with the 1969 Mine Health and Safety Act. One hundred thousand American miners have died on the job in this century; 100,000 more have died of black lung, and thousands more, including Roberts's father and Richard Trumka's father, are slowly suffocating from the disease. In the twenty-five years before the passage

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of the mine safety act, 12,000 miners died; in the twenty-five years after passage, 3,000 died.

John L. Lewis once stood up at a labor convention and introduced himself thus, "I represent those coal miners who are still alive." Roberts introduced himself this year saying, "I represent those coal miners who still have a job."

ORGANIZED LABOR HAS ITSELF MUCH TO atone for in suppressing wages and militant unionism around the globe. Until two years ago, its international departments were extensions of the C.I.A. and the U.S. foreign policy apparatus, earning the distinction of doing more than anyone to destroy independent and left unions from Latin America to Africa to Asia. One of the vilest cold warriors in labor had been Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers until his death earlier this year. Two years ago Shanker had been on the losing side in the election battle between John Sweeney and Tom Donahue, and this year, in an effort to bind remaining wounds, Sweeney and company decided to present a posthumous award to Shanker for "lifetime service to workers around the world".

Trumka drew the short straw on this one, having to present the award, just as earlier he had to read the declarations honoring Lane Kirkland and Tom Donahue, men who saw "solidarity as an awesome challenge". Trumka went over the top in trying to mollify the old foes, calling Shanker "one of the giants of the labor movement of the twentieth century".

THE SWEENEY TEAM IS FAR FROM PERFECT, but to get perspective all you had to do was take a stroll among the thugs and snobs of organized labor, the business unionists who identify most with business, the guys gnashing their teeth over the federation's decision to oppose soft money, the state fed presidents furious with upstart militants in the labor councils, the racists and anti-communists and bigots of all sorts who still have sinecures that Sweeney *et al.* are powerless to change.

There was muffled whispering during the convention about the future of Ron Carey at the Teamsters, and with him perhaps the future of new labor. In 1995, Sweeney won the election by 1.5 million votes; Carey accounted for 1.4 million of those. The opposition to Sweeney in the federation is real, but so far it's had no pole around which to coalesce. Were James Hoffa, Jr., to gain control of the Teamsters, he could be that pole.

Carey gave a press conference during the convention, his first since the revelations of money laundering into his campaign and the guilty pleas of two consultants and his campaign manager on conspiracy charges. The assembled journalists seemed to want to believe him when he said that if he'd known of the money shuffling that bolstered his campaign chest in the late days before his 1996 election against Hoffa Junior, he "would have stopped it dead in its tracks".

Dorfman was gunned down in a parking lot in 1983, and Hoffa claims he never knew his business partner was a mobster.

He certainly presents a demeanor of tough honesty. Ken Crowe, labor correspondent for New York *Newsday* who's written a book on the Teamsters and has known Carey since the 1970s, calls Carey one of the most honorable labor people he's ever come across in his twenty-five years in the business. He also points out that Carey spent four and a half hours testifying before the grand jury, so if he's lying, he's not just out of a job, he's going to jail for perjury.

Carey said of the government's decision to rerun the election, "I believe a rerun is right; we've got to clear the air". But as trashy as have been the activities of the Washington consultants, direct-mail scam artists and Democratic Party operatives implicated in the case, the whole affair raises a lot of political questions no one is asking. With Washington up to its neck in campaign finance scandal, why is no one calling for a rerun of the Clinton-Dole election and suggesting that Clinton ought to be disqualified? Closer to the home of this investigation, why is no one investigating Hoffa Junior's $2 million in funds he says were raised through cakes sales and bingo? Or the fundraiser he held at a race track? Or his former association with Allen Dorfman, a Chicago mob figure whom Hoffa Senior put in charge of the Teamster pension fund when he went to prison for ripping it off of $200 million? (Dorfman was gunned down in a parking lot in 1983, and Junior claims he never knew his business partner was a mobster.)

When the Carey people asked the government why there was no inquiry into the sources of Hoffa money, they were told it's because Hoffa "didn't win". That's really the problem. Carey won. And then he won the biggest strike this country has seen in twenty years, a strike in which Hoffa sided with the company. And he's been vital to that part of labor whose fighting spirit is beginning to make Americans think it might not be such a bad idea to have unions win in this country. People like Carey are dangerous. ■

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"Pain is part of the process".

Three days before the shareholders' meeting a new report by two Hong Kong research groups, the Asia Monitor Resource Centre and the Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee, documented conditions in four Nike factories on the Chinese mainland.

Nike's factories consistently violate China's wage laws, which decree a minimum of 25 cents an hour. Nike workers in China are getting as little as 15 cents an hour. China's official work week is capped at 44 hours, but Nike workers are required to put in 73 hours a week, plus an additional two to five hours of overtime a day. If workers refuse to do the overtime, they can be docked a day's pay. The Hong Kong monitors found children as young as thirteen employed in sewing and cutting, both dangerous tasks that often results in mangled hands and fingers lost to cutting machines. The use of child labor violates Chinese law and Nike's own code of conduct. Although Chinese laws requires companies to grant maternity leave, at the Nike shoe plants pregnant workers are regularly fired. Women over the age of 25 are often let go as being "too old". Always worried about exploitation, Nike requires these ill-paid workers to lodge a month's wages with the factory as "security".

Warmed up by Clarke, the crowd gave Phil Knight a standing ovation as he strode to the podium. It was his "unpleasant task", Knight began, "to once again be forced to deal with the issue of foreign factory relations". Knight said he "couldn't believe it" because "it's so clear that good shoes are made in good factories. Good factories have good labor relations. We're running essentially good factories."

"Of course", the billionaire exclaimed, "we treat our workers well." Knight adduced his proofs for this proposition: the report from Andrew Young ("a man of great intellect, enormous accomplishment and unquestionable integrity"), Nike's presence on Clinton's Apparel Industry Partnership (a piece of flummery, as the title suggests) and most crucially, a victory over the United Methodists, convinced by Nike to drop a shareholders' resolution on sweatshops. Knight commented that the Methodists, with whom Nike had parleyed since last August, are reasonable people, not a bit like "the extremist Global Exchange", which has "shifted the terms of debate from abuse of workers to the issue of wages". Global Exchange is the San Francisco-based group that has been at the forefront of the campaign against Nike.

The United Methodist rep praised Nike for "the progress it has made".

At this point Knight summoned up Vidette Bulloch-Mixon, in the hall as the representative of the United Methodist shareholders (owners of more than 100,000 Nike shares). Bulloch-Mixon came to the microphone and issued a paean of praise to Nike on the occasion of its 25th birthday. Bulloch-Mixon also congratulated Nike on the "progress it has made" on the sweatshop issue.

Knight and Clarke then opened the session to questions from shareholders. First up was a woman who said she'd bought 1,600 shares of Nike stock eight years ago and while it was a good investment she was now troubled. Her own 12-year old daughter was refusing to wear Nike gear on the grounds that the company exploited young women. "You sound like Richard Nixon," she told Knight, "when you dismiss your critics as extremists." Knight gave an indulgent chuckle and said, "You don't know who these people really are, I'm talking about Global Exchange and what their agenda really is. Did you know they're supporting Castro's Cuba and they're aiding the Communist [aka, Zapatista] rebels in Mexico?"

This brought Global Exchange's director, Medea Benjamin, to the microphone. As Knight conspicuously gazed at his Rolex, the spunky Benjamin told the corporate titan and the shareholders that she was "appalled that you would call us extremists. We're a human rights organization". She made a direct challenge to Knight. "The people who make the shoes that make you billions of dollars in profits should at least make a living wage". Benjamin told Knight that if he truly believed Nike should be held to "a higher standard", then he should join with Global Exchange in a push to have independent monitors of Nike factories.

CounterPunch has learned that Nike is pushing to have the Investigative Group appointed as one of the monitors. This Washington, DC-based outfit, headed by Terry Lenzner, may be judged as to the rigor of its scrutiny by the fact that it was supposed to review contributions to the DNC through 1996. Readers will recall that the review process as performed by Lenzner & Co. was indulgent well past the point of farce. ■

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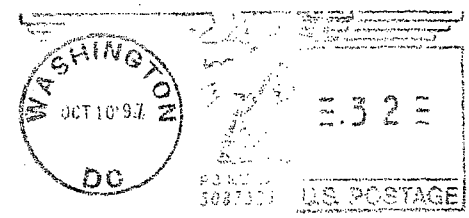

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